# Coming Home: Political Radicalization in Western Europe's Front Generation

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## Introduction: Cultural Shift and the Great War

In 1907, Max Beckmann finished one of his first major works entitled *Self Portrait Florence*. *Florence* depicts a handsome Beckmann standing up straight, staring confidently forward, wearing a dark suit and tie, and smoking a cigarette. Behind him one can see a garden painted in an impressionist style with flowers, a tree, and in the distance rests a soft mountain range. In many ways, the picture is symbolic of the mentality of upper middle class Europeans in the late 19th century. The clothing Beckmann is wearing and his posturing represent the self-assured and empowered upper middle class, a bourgeois class that shared power in the parliaments in Western Europe. The serene countryside in the background symbolizes the idle and calm that Europe was experiencing in the late 19th century.

The shells of the First World War changed everything. In 1914, Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, famously said, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." Thinking back on the war in the 1920s, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in *Tender is the Night* that:

> This Western Front Business couldn't be done again, not for a long time.... This took religion and years of plenty and tremendous sureties and the exact relation that existed between the classes.... You had to have a whole-souled sentimental equipment going back further than you could remember. You had to remember Christmas, and postcards of the Crown Prince and his fiancée, and little cafes in Valence and beer gardens in Unter den Linden and weddings at the Mairie, and going to the Derby, and your grandfather's whiskers... This was a love-battle; there was a century of middle class love spent here... All my beautiful safe world blew itself up here with a great gust of high explosive love (Fitzgerald, 61-62).

Modern historians, in this case Modris Eksteins, have been more literal, stating, "In the Great Surprise that became the First World War, Western Civilization was shattered, as if struck by a shell from Big Bertha" ("Cultural Impact of the Great War", 206). Reading those passages, it is almost impossible not to think back to the portrait of Max Beckman looking out confidently at

the audience, full of faith and sureties, surrounded by plenty, dressed to his class, and imagine that whole existence shattered by the outbreak of the First World War.

The immediate post war years saw important cultural shifts. A literary study by Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory,* illuminates the extent of the cultural change in British language and literature. In one chapter, Fussell concentrates on a dramatic shift in specific types of language associated with the First World War. Before the war the public used poetic wording to describe warfare: to conquer was to "vanquish," a soldier was a "warrior," and facing death was to "face peril" or to "face one's fate" (Fussell, 22). After the war the high language used by politicians, newspapers, and everyday citizens to characterize the war was rejected by returning veterans who knew the reality—war was not glorious and neither was death; war was brutal and the best death could be was quick and clean.

Art was also changed by the First World War. European painters were affected by their time in the frontlines; Max Beckmann was noticeably shaken by his experiences during the war. Compared with the 1917 piece *Self Portrait with Red Scarf, Self Portrait Florence* belongs to a different age. In *Red Scarf,* we see Beckmann back from his time at the front lines as a medical orderly. The artist is depicted at his easel, the look on his face a look of fear rather than confidence. His face is slightly elongated, suggestive of deformation, although Beckmann himself was not wounded in combat. He has replaced his suit and tie with a more bohemian white shirt and a red scarf tied around his neck. Instead of an idyllic countryside, the window behind his head is a foreboding, solid yellow hue. The painting is symbolic of the new European man: the returning front soldier. After his time at the front, Max Beckman did not have the same self-confidence, he was psychologically wounded by his experiences, and his future was uncertain.

Like Max Beckmann, many other front soldiers had a transformative experience in the First World War. On the 28th of March, 1919, Paul Tuffrau, a French veteran of the trenches wrote, "This morning I went to Fontainebleau for demobilization.... Life goes on, things remain the same, it is only us that have changed" (Palmer and Wallis, 361). In the semi-autobiographical *All Quiet on the Western Front,* Erich Maria Remarque's protagonist, Paul Baeumer, finds while on leave that "it was different a year ago. It is I of course that have changed in the interval" (Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front, 168).

Most soldiers were probably able to return to their families and jobs without too much difficulty during the interwar period; nevertheless, there were a significant number of soldiers who returned disinterested in calmly re-entering society. These soldiers returned wanting to change society based on their experiences in the trenches. The soldiers' desires were not uniformly negative. After the First World War there were new intellectual leanings in European such as veterans groups inclined towards pacifism, most notably in France. At the same time, in 1919, William Butler Yeats wrote "The Second Coming" which echoed the disharmony of the immediate interwar period stating, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.... The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity" (Yeats, 165). Many of the returning front soldiers were among societies' most unsettled members. Full of passionate intensity to match their own transformed state, they attacked the social order from the left and the right and helped to radicalize society.

Large groups of people, many of them veterans, used techniques learned in war such as violent seizures of property and political assassination to promote a descent into what Max Weber called the ethics of sensibility (*Gesinnungsethik,* maybe best translated as visceral feeling). As a consequence, there were strong connections between the radical politics of the

immediate interwar period and the front experience. An example of a front soldier who wants to remake society appears in Erich Maria Remarque's *Three Comrades.* The protagonist of the story describes his closest friends returning from the war, stating:

> I sat a long while and thought of all sorts of things. Among others, oh how we came back from the war, like miners from a pit disaster, young and disillusioned of everything but ourselves. We had meant to wage war against the lies, the selfishness, the greed, the inertia of the heart that was the cause of all that lay behind us; we had become hard without trust in anything but in our comrades beside us and in things – the sky, trees, the earth, bread, tobacco, that never played false to any man (Remarque, Three Comrades, 60).

Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Jeremy Mitchell's book *Conditions of Democracy in Europe 1919-1939* analyzes the threat posed by radical political movements. All of the governments faced challenges from radical parties in the immediate interwar period. In England, the radicals made the least headway. Through the 1920s they composed a minuscule minority of voters, never taking a seat in the parliament. In France, the fascist *ligues* and the *Parti Communiste Français* accounted for less than five percent of the vote in 1919 but by 1924 their percentage had risen to over ten percent, which corresponded to 26 seats in the parliament. In Germany, the parties of the left (KPD) and the right (NSDAP and other Voelkisch parties) together took less than five percent of the vote in 1919; in 1920 they took more than five percent of the vote and thirteen seats in the parliament; and in April 1924 the extreme parties accounted for over twenty five percent of the vote and one hundred twenty three seats in the *Reichstag.* In Italy, the Fascist party and the communist party received no votes in 1919, while the ex-servicemen party received around five percent of the vote and twenty seats in the parliament. In 1921 the ex-servicemen party had shrunk to less than one percent of the population, while the communist party and the Fascist party took around five percent of the vote and fifty two seats in the parliament. By 1924 the Fascist party had seized power completely and in the last free elections in Italy before World

War Two the Fascist party received sixty-five percent of the vote. The second largest party was the communist party with ten percent of the vote. In Italy, more profoundly than other nations, the center had completely emptied, and radicalism had triumphed (Berg-Schlosser, 169-307).

Most of the current scholarship on political conditions of the interwar period focuses only on particular nations without drawing connections to the broader transformation happening in European politics. As examples of interwar political analysis that bypass the broader context, one may suggest Richard Bessel's *Germany after the First World War,* or Jean-Jacques Becker's *The Great War and the French People.* Scholarship focusing on the rise of particular ex-front soldier radicals, such as Robert Waite's *Vanguard of Nazism,* or Antoine Prost's *Les Anciens Combattants et la Société Française* (Veterans and French Society), often only hints at the similarities between the rising radicalism in neighboring countries. There is also a lack of English language research into postwar leftist movements in Italy and France.

This thesis will redress the lack of comparative scholarship on veterans' movements in the interwar period. Between 1918 and 1924 politically motivated veterans groups challenged bourgeois governance in many governments in Western Europe. Pervasive among the veterans was the belief that the First World War, and the subsequent horrors of the war, was the result of the policies of rational and predictable bourgeois states. For many veterans the undermining of the bourgeois state was a rejection of the same states that led up to the war. Groups of veterans organized their extremist movements in opposition to the bourgeois state. On the left and the right they attempted to transform politics through militarization, preferring to use force rather than compromise, brutality rather than persuasion, and visceral feeling rather than rationality.

The impact of these extremist veterans was the emptying of the political center in Western Europe during the interwar period. On the left, workers' and soldiers' councils in

Germany and Great Britain (and to a more limited extent, France and Italy) aroused fears of an impending Bolshevik revolution. One the right, veterans groups, often called *fascio* or *faiceau* or fascists were fearful that leftist revolutions, which had struck successfully in Russia, Hungary, and in both Berlin and Munich. The rightwing soldiers swiftly moved to violently crush labor movements in Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy. At the same time, politically active war artists accurately portrayed the mood of the radical movements. The radical soldiers were violent, anti-bourgeois, and anti-democratic, and they believed in rebuilding society based upon their experiences in the trenches. These attitudes transcended national borders and language barriers, creating a common and radical European political current.

**Red Years: The Rise of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils 1917-1920**

The veterans struck their first blows against the liberal, democratic governments of Western Europe even before the war ended. On May 3rd 1917, in the midst of the unsuccessful Nivelle Offensive, which cost more than one hundred thousand lives, the rank and file of the French Second Division refused an order to attack at *Chemin-des-Dames.* The mutiny of the Second Division quickly spread to other units in the French Army—eventually over fifty divisions of soldiers were refusing the orders of their commanding officers, over half the strength of the French Army. The demands of the soldiers were neither pacifistic nor revolutionary; the soldiers were ready to defend France against a German attack, but simply refused to follow the orders of their commanding officers to renew the failed offensive. The French General Command acted quickly by replacing General Nivelle with General Pétain, allotting additional privileges to the lower ranks, and executing the most revolutionary of the mutineers.

The French Army Mutinies could have heralded an early end to the war had they proved more revolutionary. Between the 16th of May and the 31st of May, 1917 soldiers from several regiments in the French Army organized into soldiers' councils that spoke openly of ending the war by marching on Paris (Between Mutiny and Obedience, 182). However, as Lens Smith notes in his book *Between Mutiny and Obedience* the mutineers' most important demand was assurance of continued links with the interior through the resumption of normal leave. Smith continues: "leaves constituted soldiers' main connection to life beyond the war…. Once links to the home front were guaranteed by leave reform, soldiers could give up their demand for immediate peace" (Between Mutiny and Obedience, 191).

Nevertheless, the rejection of traditional military hierarchies was a revolutionary step. Before 1917 almost a million French soldiers had been killed, many of them in the meat grinder of Verdun, but the soldiers had never mutinied. The widespread disposition of the mutinies attacked the foundation of societal hierarchy and undermined the idea that the upper-class officers should lead and the lower ranks should follow. The French Army Mutinies were followed by similar mutinies in almost all of the belligerents' armies immediately before and after the armistice. The demands of the soldiers were almost always practical (longer and more frequent leaves, more rapid demobilization), but they were to become political after events in Russia drove home the potential power wielded by these masses of dissatisfied, armed men. The rise of the Petrograd Soviet in February 1917 and its replacement of the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky provided an object lesson for soldiers in the West of the power of politically organized veterans.

In late October 1918, the admirals of the High Command ordered the German Navy out to sea on a suicide mission against the British fleet. The sailors had no intention of becoming

sacrificed as lambs, especially since it had become abundantly clear that the war would soon end. As with soldiers in the French Mutinies, the Kiel sailors "had immediate grievances but little desire to change the political world. They were concerned with rations, the release of their friends and above all to not have to fight" (Wrigley, 36). Fighting erupted between sailors loyal to the High Command and sailors who preferred radical action. Some of the revolutionary sailors had connections with the political left, and on November 2nd the sailors organized massive meetings with members of the Independent Socialist Party (USPD) and the Socialist Party (SPD) and formed the first Western Soviet, the Kiel workers' and soldiers' council, and the forerunner of the revolution that would topple the *Kaiserreich*.

An English war correspondent, Percy Brown, who was captured by the Germans and held at Ruhleben prison camp, was the first Englishman into Berlin after the Armistice on November 11th. After being released by his captors who had joined revolting Kiel soldiers, Brown travelled to Berlin where he was witness to some of the first fighting of the revolution between forces loyal to the Kaiser and revolutionaries. He checked into the Adlon hotel and his photographs from the time show that the Adlon was occupied by soldiers. Other photographs taken show revolutionary soldiers blockading streets, handing out leaflets, and operating patrols. One such patrol, "took [him] on the most exhilarating drive of [his] life" (Brown, "When Germany Cracked"). The patrol, composed of German soldiers and sailors, and one recently released French soldier, confronted loyalists who had attacked a bread riot. After a brief skirmish, a Kiel sailor convinced the government troops to join the revolutionaries. All around Berlin soldiers were spontaneously joining with the revolution that promised an immediate end to the war. Without the support of the majority of soldiers within Berlin, the Kaiser's

government had collapsed and Prince Max von Baden had asked the Socialist Party to form a new interim government.

The German revolution had spread rapidly. By the 6th of November workers' and soldiers' councils had been organized in "Bremen, Hamburg, and Wilhelmshaven. The next day they had spread to Hanover, Brunswick, Hanau, and Munich. By 10 November, most of Germany's cities and major towns had workers' council institutions of some sort" (Gluckstein, 108). Eventually, with the help of Karl Liebknecht, an "Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils" was devised. As in Russia, the German workers' and soldiers' councils attempted to wrest control away from the provisional government. In Munich, the Wittelsbach monarchy was deposed by armed workers and soldiers under the command of Independent Socialist member Kurt Eisner. Around Germany "the old order bowed before the demands of armed workers' and soldiers' councils with little or no resistance" (Wrigley, 36). Finally, on the 9th of November, the Kaiser fled to the Netherlands.

Many of the soldiers returning from the front were willing to work with the working class—a group of people who were also mobilized and organized in the war effort—to replace the bourgeois, liberal governments of 19th century Europe. Danny Gluckstein documents a conversation between two French *poilus* on a train that was published in a 1918 magazine. The first soldier states "We will replace capitalism with a new order… call it socialism, communism… it will not be monarchy, 'democracy', or individualism…. The young men in the trenches, and the young women in the munitions factories, know now what communism means…." His comrade responds, "Shall we forget these years? Shall we turn the country for which we have bled… back to the capitalists, back to your democratic aristocrats…. To whom does France belong? It belongs to us who fought—to the women who labour in munitions…

France is our's now…" (Gluckstein, 58 -59). The most common form of cooperation between the workers and soldiers was the Council or Soviet, a revolutionary body of workers and soldiers developed in Petrograd during the Russian revolution, which was replicated by the workers and soldiers of Western Europe in the immediate interwar period. These Soviets were used by radical workers and soldiers to organize protests, property seizures, and even syndicalist style general strikes.

In 1918, a number of workers' and soldiers' councils were formed all over Western Europe. The German Soviets were the most revolutionary. In the most militant areas of Germany, the workers' and soldiers' councils replaced municipal governments. In Neukoelln the workers' and soldiers' council declared its intention to seize the municipal offices and factories. In Spandau workers and soldiers at the *Staatswerkstaetten* drove out management and planned conversion of the factory from wartime production (machine guns) to peacetime production. In Prussia, *Junker*s were evicted from their land, which was forcibly redistributed by workers and soldiers. Most importantly for the soldiers, a congress of over three hundred front line units met at Ems and forbade the continued use of epaulettes and separate mess-halls for the officers and the enlisted men (Gluckstein, 124-139). And when German ships sailed to Scapa Flow to surrender to the British Navy, they carried with them four representatives of the National Workers' and Soldiers' Council (Great Britain Navy Grand Fleet).

In addition to Berlin, Munich was also a center of radicalism in the immediate post-war period. Within Munich, "the rapidly increasing unemployment resulting from the demobilization of the troops" radicalized politics (Wrigley, 61). The German Spartacists organized in Munich, and were the most unified of the anti-government Soviets. The Spartacists formed on December 11$^{th}$, 1918 under the leadership of Max Levien and Erich Muehsam. Within a few weeks the

Spartacists had control of the city and their doctrines were being exported by pamphlet to other socialist groups around Europe. According to the tract *The German Spartacists: Their Aims and Objects,* published by the British Socialist party, the Spartacists had dozens of demands including:

> The disarming of the entire police force, of all officers, as well as of the non-proletariat soldiers… The seizure of all supplies of arms and ammunition… The arming of the entire adult male population as the workers militia… Abolition of the commanding power of the officers and non-commissioned officers. The substitution of the voluntary discipline of the soldiers. Removal of all parliaments and municipal courts… Election of workers' councils… Abolition of class distinctions… Limitation of the working day to six hours… Expropriation of land held by all large and medium-sized agricultural concerns; establishment of socialist agricultural co-operatives… Nationalization… of all banks, ore mines, coal mines... Confiscation of all property exceeding a certain limit… (Spartacist Union, 9-10)

During spring 1919, the Spartacists enacted their revolutionary program in Munich, driving the legitimate government to Bamberg, and then using the former soldiers as a revolutionary "red guard" to defend the gains made by the left. Nonetheless, in the spring of 1919 the Spartacist Union in Munich was forcibly "pacified" by Free Corps (sometimes also known as *Freikorps, Landsknecht* or Freebooters, a reference to the irregular military formations of the Thirty Years War*).* These mercenary right wing paramilitaries hired by the Weimar government conducted the bloodiest encounters by opposing veterans on the political extremes in the immediate postwar period.

However there are some concerns about grouping the German soldiers too closely with workers in the postwar period. English war reporter Percy Brown details the beginning of the revolution in the Ruhleben prison camp. In early November 1918, a train passed the camp filled with Kiel sailors waving red flags. The camp guards were unsure of how to proceed. Should the guards follow the revolutionaries or should they remain loyal to the Kaiser? Brown asked one of

the guards, Herr Baecker, what the guards were going to do. The guard responded "We don't know. We must wait and see what happens in Berlin" (Brown, "The Penny Magazine"). The guards opted to revolt; the prisoners "supplied, dyed, and hoisted" a red tablecloth to oblige the guard who seemed confused about the way to proceed (Brown, "Trafalgar Square"). By the time the prisoners finished making the red flag, the guards were "already stripping their officers of epaulettes and rank badges, the first official sign of the revolution and formation of a Soldiers' Council ("When Germany Cracked"). Nevertheless, it seems clear that in Ruhleben, and most likely throughout the continent, many of the soldiers were not always sure about being revolutionaries.

The organization of workers' and soldiers' councils was not limited to Germany; there were serious workers' and soldiers movements throughout Western Europe. But the rapid and unplanned collapse of the German armies probably led to the German councils' unusual strength following the Armistice. In contrast, the orderly demobilization of allied armies limited the absolute number of returning soldiers, weakening the council movement in France, Great Britain, and Italy.

On the other hand, the slow demobilization of soldiers also caused a few mutinies. In England there were widespread reports of soldiers' councils, but these groups never organized nationally. There were troop mutinies all over the globe—in France, Russia, Ireland, and the Punjab — in response to the slow demobilization of British soldiers. At a depot in Kempton Park soldiers formed a Soviet. In 1918, Labour politician Hastings Lees Smith reported to parliament that five battalions organized a delegates meeting and passed a series of resolutions (Bogacz, 257). In Whitehall and Dover, soldiers refusing to return to France after the Armistice mutinied and formed councils that, according to military planners, bore a "dangerous

resemblance to a Soviet." In Calais, soldiers mutinied asking for "better pay and quicker demobilization, but also recognition of the soldiers' councils and permission to attend the 'Hands off Russia' rally at the Albert Hall." An organization formed called the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Union that Members of Parliament accused of having distinctly Bolshevik undertones (Wrigley, 267-268).

In Italy there was also significant revolutionary action; in fact, these are called the red years (*biennio rosso*). However, as in France, there was less connection between the veterans and the revolutionary workers movements in the cities than in Germany. Italian soldiers returning from the war alarmed the government by singing "revolutionary songs," such as "Let's follow Russia." In the central and southern Italian countryside, former front soldiers working with agricultural workers appropriated 27,000 hectares of uncultivated land. In the northern cities of Turin massive food strikes led to "fraternization between troops and the masses intent on holding down food prices. Shops were forcibly opened and their contents distributed by the marketplace 'soviets' (Gluckstein, 176).

In France there were fewer Soviets formed and the results were less revolutionary than in Great Britain or Italy. In general the French labor movement was largely "isolated from broader public, and military, opinion." Nevertheless, there were several links between the labor movement and former front soldiers in the postwar period. The most radical and "most discounted [soldiers] took their bitterness… to trade unions" (Prost, 33). In 1918, the survivors of a battalion of Parisian school teachers were organizing frequently to debate unionization, but were blocked by a prefect (Wrigley, 138). In Marseille, disabled and demobilized veterans met to organize against unemployment. The *anciens combattants* of Marseille directed their anger "against civilians… the shirkers and the new rich" (Prost, 32).

The different Soviets and worker-influenced labor movements of the immediate interwar period were initially disorganized, but eventually were able to work better together to pursue the goal of global proletarian government. The international revolutionary leftist parties were organized into the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919, which brought organized labor under the influence of an international body. Various leftwing groups—the Spartacists in Germany, labor unionists in France represented by the French Communist Party and various syndicalist organizations, the British labor movements, and the Italian socialist party—were present at the first meeting of the Communist International in Moscow. Nonetheless, the development of the Communist International came at the time when truly revolutionary labor was weakening in Western Europe vis-à-vis the forces of reaction. After the formation of the Comintern, the immediate reaction of many parties on the left was to split between supporters of revolutionary action directed by the Comintern and independent, moderate, reformist action. In 1920 the French left split into the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and in the same year the German Communist Party gained from the split of the Independent Socialist Party (USPD), and in 1921 the Italian Communist Party split from the Italian Socialist Party. The international left was beginning to show division.

The last large revolutionary action in these countries that included both soldiers and workers was the March 1919 Revolution in the Ruhr valley. In response to a right-wing putsch attempt in Berlin, labor unions called for a general strike on March 14th and Ruhr workers and soldiers formed a *Rote Ruhrarmee* that quickly took control of industrial cities such as Duesseldorf and Essen. The whole revolution was supported by the German Communist Party (KPD). In a recreation of the events of 1918, the Ruhr Red Army used workers' and soldiers' militia to seize power at the local level; however, the central government was not sympathetic to

the uprising in the Ruhr and sent government soldiers and *Freikorps* units to oust the revolutionaries. Within a few weeks the government troops and *Freikorps* were able to defeat the revolutionaries. The atmosphere that had allowed the workers' and soldiers' councils to flourish in the immediate interwar period was dead by 1920.

One reason for the collapse of the workers' and soldiers' councils was significant ruptures between veterans and workers within the council movement. During the war, many soldiers felt common cause with the workers in the factories. For example, in France the soldiers identified strongly with the *midinettes,* women textile workers in Paris. One French soldier wrote home, "We are doing them like the *midinettes.* We have gone out on strike…." Another French soldier wrote, "A soldier on leave told me that things in Paris are heating up and that today there is supposed to be a general strike… so much the better… it can bring this hell to an end" (Smith, 189-91).

However, once the war ended the wartime unity of soldiers and labor began to be undermined. The most militant of the workers inside the workers' and soldiers' councils were the metal workers. An English Socialist pamphlet published in 1917, for example, called "Soldiers of Labor" documents the feeling in many factories that the workers' contribution was as significant as that of the soldiers. In "Soldiers of Labor," the metallurgists are one:

> with the charging soldiers in the field… with the men in the trenches… with the men who go forth to destroy the enemy in the darkness of the night… with the men who slay so that life may come. These splendid workers… are one and indivisible with the soldiers in the field (Soldiers of Labor).

As a consequence of these types of government publications during a time in when workers and government had negotiated to limit strikes in support of the war effort, workers saw themselves as *equal* contributors to the war effort—a point that many soldiers were unwilling to concede. At the same time, the end of the war threatened the enhanced social position of war industry

workers, such as metal workers, and those workers were willing to strike to keep their jobs, the high war production, and their higher war wages.

The total number of strikers in England went from almost nine hundred thousand in the three years before the war, to seven hundred thousand during the war, ending with over two million in the three years after the war. The increase in strikers was mirrored in Germany, France, and Italy (Gluckstein, 51). These largest of these strikes were organized by metal workers. In Great Britain there were massive revolts of the metal workers on the Clyde. In Italy, metal workers in Turin were responsible for massive numbers of revolutionary actions, most importantly, sit-in strikes, in 1918 and 1919. In France, the metal workers (*Métallos*) were involved in a summertime 1920 general strike, developing a particularly "macho, *frondeur* image" (Wrigley, 136).

In general, despite claims of solidarity, the metalworkers were ambivalent towards the soldiers. One French veteran, and subsequent labor activist from Le Creusot, Albert Vassart, wrote that "none of his [army buddies] were active militants in a labor union" (Vassart, 3). But Vassart was a veteran and a labor union leader. There were reports of French metal workers eulogizing French mutineers killed in the Black Sea. At the same time, some French metal workers and anarchists took weekend trips to the countryside "desecrating war memorials" (Wrigley, 138-146). For the most part, these strikes did not serve the interests of the soldiers coming back from the war looking for work and in some cases the soldiers acted against the strikes. During the 1920 General Strike in France, organized veterans crossed the picket lines to help keep the transportation system working (Prost, 34).

At the same time, there was tension over the willingness of government to work with war veterans, but not workers' movements. A large number of the soldiers' demands were granted in

the immediate post-war period, while many of the workers' demands were deemed too radical. In France, the first parliament after the war was called the "horizon blue parliament" because it had so many ex-soldiers and was largely sympathetic to the plight of ex-soldiers. In Germany, the first National Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils saw the passage of almost all of the proposed army reforms, but few of the other motions were even considered by the Council. The most radical members of the Council (those who were not soldiers) began calling the Council the "suicide club" because the National Congress was supposedly "signing the death warrant of the council movement" and a Spartacist member demanded "What then were the points of vital and decisive significance upon which the Congress had to decide? Above all those that were rejected" (Gluckstein, 143). After the passage of many of the soldiers' demands, there was little reason for veterans to continue to work within the council movement.

Aside from fragmentation within the revolutionary left, the workers' and soldiers' councils were undercut by the demobilization process. Once the soldiers had been disarmed and demobilized, they ceased being an existential threat to liberal, democratic governments. In 1918 there were tens of thousands of soldiers gathered around Berlin and Kiel. The workers' and soldiers' councils had the military capacity to dominate the central government of Germany. Within a few months, the mutinous military was "leaving the Baltic city of Kiel by the thousands" testifying to the limited goals of many soldiers (Wrigley, 189). By the middle of 1919, the Supreme Soldiers' Council was being supplanted by Minister of Defense Gustav Noske's mercenary Iron Naval Brigade Kiel, a Free Corps organization that was replacing the military authority of the workers' and soldier's councils. The weaker Kiel Supreme Soldiers Council could only manage a mild complaint to the rise of the Iron Brigade. Similar

demobilizations of British soldiers ended mutinies in Northern France, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

Concurrently, the workers' and soldiers' movement was facing external threats from organized reactionary soldiers supported by bourgeois, liberal governments in Western Europe. In Germany, the Social Democrats helped organize Free Corps who were unleashed upon labor revolutionaries in Bavaria and the Ruhr. In the United Kingdom, different British fascist organizations terrorized labor movements in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In France, the *Action Française* and other proto-fascist groups routinely used street violence to intimidate labor unionists. In Italy, Gabriele D'Annunzio and other wartime commanders organized squads to terrorize labor sympathizers. Throughout Western Europe the left, largely disorganized and demobilized, proved little match for the jack boots of the fascist squads that rose to challenge them during the 'Red Years.'

**The Reaction to the Red Years and the Rise of the Freebooters, 1919-1926**

At the end of the war, not all soldiers were inclined towards Soviet-style revolution. Many veterans were disturbed by the Bolshevik-influenced workers' and soldiers' councils that were forming around Western Europe. One person infuriated by the revolution in Germany was Rudolf Hess. On the 14th of November, Hess wrote his parents about the Armistice stating, "Who would have thought that our compatriots could be so base, so mean, so shameless…? Naturally they have taken neither my gun, epaulettes, nor insignia" (Palmer, 350). Almost a year later, responding to the Spartacist revolution in Munich he wrote, "Our people are morally debased. But the same happened in other countries, where there was a revolution. There is no reason why our nation should not recover" (Palmer, 358). In the following years, Hess would

become one of the central figures in a European right-wing response to the "Red Years" that would threaten liberal, democratic government from the right.

The reactionary response to the "Red Years" began soon after the first communists stormed the groceries in Milan, the first striking workers disturbed production in Paris or on the Clyde, and the first leftwing veterans took control of governments in Bavaria. In the immediate interwar period, Western European governments were interested in hiring ex-front soldiers to act as strike breakers, to fight pro-revolutionary mobs, and to provide security and stability. For example, the story of German fascism cannot be told without mention of the Free Corps (*Freikorps)*— those extremist soldiers organized at the Weimar government's behest to defeat left-wing revolutions in Bavaria and the Ruhr valley. Ironically, some similar groups of ex-front soldiers were already organizing independently to attack the society that had forced them to go to war. The ambivalence to or outright collusions with the fascists by the governments in Western Europe would allow the dangerous rise of fascists to power in Italy and later Germany and to positions of importance in England and France.

Italian Fascism provided the archetypal model of fascist development for the rest of Europe. In 1919, the Italian peninsula was suffering the social malaise of the "Red Years." In the countryside, returning veterans and peasant farmers had appropriated large amounts of property. In the cities, a food shortage had encouraged veterans' organizations to team up with factory workers and loot stores. In 1919, Italian fascists acted to undercut rampant communist insurgency and promote a new type of revolutionary corporatism. The *Partito nazionale fascista* was formed in 1919 in order to respond to communism and to promote a revolutionary reform of the bourgeois system. These Fascists acted violently when it was possible, crushing the communist opposition. The Fascists also cooperated when it was a political necessity, working

out arrangements with the political right to share power from 1922 until 1924. By 1926, the Italian Fascist party, with Mussolini as *Il Duce,* was firmly in control of the Italian government.

The first fascist action in Italy was the occupation of Fiume by Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1919. At the end of the Great War, many Italians believed that Italy did not annex enough territory to make up for the massive loss of life the Italian armies suffered in the Alps. A great number of Italians took to calling the Paris Peace the "mutilated peace," under the mistaken idea that Italy was not granted the concessions she demanded under the 1915 Treaty of London. As a response, D'Annunzio led thousands of ex-front soldiers into the free city of Fiume on the Dalmatian Coast. The Italian government was unwilling to annex Fiume, but politically unable to oust the popular D'Annunzio. The Yugoslav government was unprepared to attack Fiume for fear of an Italian reprisal. After the Treaty of Rapallo between Italy and Yugoslavia that promised Fiume to the Slavs, D'Annunzio declared war on both Italy and Yugoslavia. Only after the Italian navy bombarded Fiume did he surrender and return to Italy. Although D'Annunzio was discredited politically, his movement in Fiume provided the intellectual and aesthetic influence for the rise of Italian Fascism. It was D'Annunzio who developed the marching, martial, uniformed nature of the ex-front soldier groups that would form the nucleus of the fascist movements.

The *Fasci di Combattimento* were officially founded on March 23rd, 1919 in the Plaza San Sepolcro in Milan. In the plaza, Mussolini made two speeches calling for the annexation of territory in Fiume, the Dalmatian Coast and colonial Africa, and eulogizing war veterans. The vast majority of the crowd was composed of *arditi* (best translated as "the braves")—the elite storm troops of the Italian armed forces that would later become the infamous Fascist black shirts. On November 7th, 1921 the *Fasci di Combattimento* was amalgamated into the newly

formed Italian Fascist Party. The original platform of the Italian Fascists was syndicalist, promoting a corporatist agenda. Mussolini also attacked both the bourgeois center parties and the parties of the extreme left, calling them too conservative or insufficiently radical. The Fascists were able to build a kind of agreement with the conservative parties of the right—business interests were paying Fascists expenses since the first months of 1919 (Cassels, 28). By 1921, the Fascist Party in Italy had over two hundred fifty thousand members, a large number of whom had been front-line soldiers.

Despite the presence of a strong leader in Mussolini, the Fascist Party of Italy was not necessarily centralized. The real power of the Fascist Party was located in the numerous *squadristi* who were organized on a local level and run by heads called *Ras*. In the future, these *Ras* would take important positions in the Fascist hierarchy after Mussolini came to power. The *Ras* were very influential in Fascist politics and they were concerned with revolutionary action to reverse the spread of communism. In 1920 conflict between Fascist Blackshirts and communist Redshirts created a de facto Italian civil war. The Fascist squads acted to restore the land stolen by ex-front soldiers and peasant farmers. On the weekends, the *squadristi* raided the offices of left leaning newspapers, rural cooperatives, and trade unions. If the Fascists caught supporters of those organizations they would either beat the offender with a typical Fascist club called a *manganello* or give the offender a dose of castor oil causing diarrhea (Cassels, 30). In 1921 Mussolini reached an agreement with the Italian Socialist Party to limit conflict between the extreme right and the extreme left. The measure was strongly opposed by the different *Ras.* Mussolini momentarily resigned from the Fascist Party, but his departure was mostly symbolic. Within a few weeks Mussolini returned as the leader of the Fascists, but the agreement with the Socialists was suspended permanently.

Although the Fascists had taken over thirty seats in the Italian parliament by cooperating with the 'National Union' of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti; neither Mussolini nor the *Ras* were content to remain junior partners in any government coalition. By 1922 the Fascists were strong enough to begin to take power in Italy. In the countryside, *squadristi* were violently taking control of the centers of large towns. In Ferrara, Ravenna, and Parma the local government was intimidated by the Fascists. In the territories of Trieste and Alto Adige, local *squadristi* seized control of regional governments, replacing intransigent ministers. On August 3rd, members of the Milan *fascio di combattimento* occupied city hall and ousted the socialist mayor (Cassels, 38). The 24th of October, 1922, Mussolini spoke in front of a large group of Fascist supporters, promising a 'March on Rome' to seize the government of Italy. The Fascist *squadristi*, in military formations numbering nearly thirty thousand, organized and began a maneuver towards Rome. Although the bourgeois government would most likely have been able to dispel the Fascist formations with the armed forces, King Victor Emmanuel and the Giovanni Giolitti cabinet did not have the stomach to face the Fascists. On October 29th, 1922 the King asked Mussolini to form a cabinet and Fascism became the central party of Italian politics. A good number of the *Ras* were upset at missing the opportunity for combat; Mussolini placated them by allowing the Fascist formations a victory march through Rome (Cassels, 41).

When the *Partito nazionale fascista* came to power, the elite of the Fascist Party were willing to make many concessions to their political platform. In general, the most revolutionary social proposals, vestiges from Mussolini's time as a socialist, were dropped for the big business allies of the Fascists. Many bourgeois politicians hoped that authority would completely moderate the Fascists' activity, but they were sorely mistaken. The attacks on communists, peasants, and labor unionists continued unabated. When Giancomo Matteotti, a *Populari partito*

centralist politician, published a narrative in 1924 about the violent nature of fascism, he was kidnapped and killed by five fascist *arditi*. In the subsequent elections in 1924, violence, suppression, and electoral fraud were rampant. However, sixty-five percent of the Italian people voted for the Fascist party; the second largest party in 1924 was the Communist Party. In Italy, the political center had emptied entirely; the forces of revolution trumped the politics of responsibility.

The most minor fascist response came in England where the government seemed unusually adept at subverting the radicalism of right-leaning war veterans. In the immediate interwar period there were a number of small, proto-fascist organizations with anti-socialist ideologies that provided the bridge between early anti-Bolshevism and the ideological fascism of the 1920s. In 1917, Brigadier General Henry Page founded the National Party, which put forward a strongly anti-socialist and anti-syndicalist position. Another organization called the British Commonwealth Union, founded in October 1917, acted against socialist and labor activists. A third group, the Comrades of the Great War, was an anti-Bolshevik association composed entirely of ex-soldiers. One common member in these groups was Patrick Hannon, an Irish-Catholic Conservative Party MP who would later be a mouthpiece for British Fascism (Linehan, 43). The Silver Badge Party was a grouping of ex-front soldiers who were deeply resentful of the government's handling of the military affairs during the Great War. Another group, Henry Page Croft's People's Defense League, was a strikebreaking organization of ex-front soldiers that operated in the Clyde against socialist agitators. The soldiers involved in these groups published a newspaper suitably called *The Veteran*, which "sought to politicise ex-servicemen and inoculate them against the Bolshevik virus" (Linehan, 47). In general, despite their anti-communist stance, these groups were less radical and cannot be classified as fascist

because their movement lacked the fundamentally revolutionary nature of fascism; these groups in fact often supported the status quo of the strict British class system.

One of the early outlets for violent, right-wing British soldiers was Ireland. At the time, Ireland was in a state of limbo. In 1914, the British established "Home Rule" for Ireland, but it was soon suspended for the First World War. Irish nationalists, unwilling to accept anything but complete independence revolted in 1916 and in 1919. The British sent regular and irregular soldiers to Ireland to quell political violence and reassert British authority. The infamous Black and Tans were an irregular formation formed from among volunteers from the interwar veterans. Many of the Black and Tans did not even have to change uniforms, keeping their military khaki and supplementing the dark green worn by the provisional police. The Black and Tans had little training, "Their only service experience had been in trench warfare which had a brutalising rather than ennobling effect" (Bennett, 38). The practices of the Black and Tans were brutal. The ex-soldiers routinely committed terrifying acts of violence: political murders, revenge killings, the burning of several villages, and in one case besieging a town for over a week. In 1922, under pressure from the British parliament, the Black and Tans were disbanded. Almost ten thousand veterans served in the Black and Tans and a large number of them were killed in conflicts in Ireland, never returning to cause problems in England. A further sizable portion never returned to England, signing up to serve as police auxiliaries in the colonies (Bennett, 222). This dispersal of radical veterans to Ireland and the colonies ultimately resulted in undermining the fascist movement within Britain.

There were at least two legitimately fascist British political parties, and their membership was mainly composed of landed aristocracy, military officers, and naval officers. In 1923, in response to the accession of Mussolini to the office of Italy's prime minister, the British Fascisti

(later British Fascists) were formed. The British Fascists took most of their organization from the Italian Fascist Party. The most important body in the British Fascist party was the Fascisti shock troops that were to grapple with communist revolutionaries on the street. These shock troops wore blue shirts and military style khaki pants. By 1924 the British Fascist Party had almost one hundred thousand members with a few thousand committed street fighters.

Another fascist group, called the National Fascisti, broke away from the British Fascist Party because the latter they considered too reactionary, and not at all revolutionary. The National Fascisti were even more enamored with Mussolini than the British Fascist Party. The shock troops of the National Fascisti, which probably numbered around one thousand, wore black shirts similar to the Italian *squadristi.* The National Fascisti's paper was called *The Fascist Gazette.* Along the lines of Mussolini's Italian Fascist Party the National Fascisti "would attempt to craft a more virile form of fascism, one with a more positive revolutionary thrust" (Linehan, 124). National Fascisti shock troops committed a variety of anti-liberal and anti-democratic actions in 1924 including methodical street fighting with communist activists, breaking up Communist Party and Labour Party meetings, and threatening various press groups including seizing a *Daily Herald* van and crashing it into a church (Linehan, 125).

Nonetheless, the British fascist movement was relatively weak in the immediate postwar period. The prevalence of right-wing parties suggests that there was a serious current of anti-communism in Britain; however, there was little interest in revolutionary politics. The prevalence of a landed aristocracy made revolutionary politics unlikely in a country that had suffered few of the privations defeated powers such as Germany suffered after the war. The numbers of committed, revolutionary shock troops were never great enough to promote real political change. At the same time, the British government was successful at keeping a large

number of soldiers under the colors. British ex-soldiers committed to continuing violent action in the 1920s could find outlets for their violent energies in Ireland as auxiliary police in the Black and Tans. The British had also committed soldiers to strangling the Bolshevik movement in its cradle in Russia, where British soldiers were supporting White Revolutionary Forces. And, there were always the colonies, a place where British soldiers could see fighting against indigenous peoples. Consequently, while the British Fascist Party and the National Fascisti both caused significant social turmoil, the threat posed by British fascism to liberal, democratic society was never very strong. By the late 1920s, both the British Fascist Party and the National Fascisti were defunct, replaced by a centralized British Fascist Union.

France was not an early hotbed for fascist action in the postwar period. The French fascist reaction took place comparatively late in Western Europe coinciding with the ascension of the *Cartel des Gauches* to the head of the French government in 1924. As in England there were many anti-communist right wing groups, such as the *Action Française* and their youth wing the *Camelots du Roi.* Another important early anti-communist group was the *Jeunesses Patriotes*. Although the *Camelot du Roi* could trace their origins to before the First World War, both the *Camelot du Roi* and the Jeunesses *Patriotes* were composed mostly of Great War veterans. The tactics of the French anti-communists groups were based largely on the Italian model. In 1923, the founder of the *Action Française,* Charles Maurras openly condoned political violence going so far as to call for the death of left-wing politicians. The *Camelot du Roi* were infamous for breaking up leftwing meetings with "jeering, fists, canes, and stink bombs" and the violent activity of the *Camelots* often led to direct confrontation with the police (Soucy, 16). The *Jeunesses Patriotes* also organized to fight with left-wing revolutionaries by forming 'centuries' of shock troops committed to responding to threats from the communists. The *Action Française*

(plus their youth formation the *Camelots du Roi*) and the *Jeunesses Patriotes* helped to brutalize politics with their support for street violence; however, neither of these parties was necessarily opposed to a reactionary regime. As evidenced by their name, the *Camelots du Roi* were openly Orleanist, supporting a semi-monarchical system that combined the Bourbon dynasty and the "Rights of Man."

The first influential postwar French fascist formation was the *Légion,* which was founded in 1924 as a direct reaction to the electoral victory by the French left wing. The leader of the *Légion,* Antoine Redier, announced its willingness to fight against the communists, stating that they "learned how to fight during the war…. (And) in order to save our unhappy country… we envisage the means of defense that are necessary, if it is necessary to take to the streets, we will be there" (Soucy, 29). Unlike both early French anti-communist groups, the *Légion* was not royalist; instead, supporting the replacement of parliamentary government with a corporatist state. Within the legionaries, the group was organized along military lines. Nevertheless, the *Légion* never developed a very large following, always being smaller than the other anti-communist groups.

The most important French fascist group was the *Faisceau,* founded by George Valois in 1925 out of a splinter group from the *Action Française.* The name *Faisceau* was a direct invocation of the Italian Fascist Party, *Faisceau* being the French word for *Fascio.* The *Faisceau* was organized into many different segments; the most important was the Faisceau of Fighters, composed entirely of World War One and colonial war veterans. The leader and founder of the *Faisceau,* George Valois, was a World War One veteran who served with distinction in the frontlines. Like Mussolini's Blackshirts, these legionaries wore matching blue shirts. And as all the parties on the right, the *Faisceau* emphasized their anti-communist

position, Valois stating that "Everyone knows that the horde is Bolshevism. Everyone knows that we call Legions those groups that repel Bolshevism" (Soucy, 88). Unlike the earlier anti-communist groups, the *Faisceau* also had a strongly worded anti-bourgeois position. Valois argued that the legionaries should attack liberalism as well because liberalism was the "mother of communism" (Soucy, 88). Throughout the mid-1920s the *Faisceau* were politically active, holding meetings, and gathering an army of around sixty thousand members.

However, the *Faisceau* did not survive long, peaking quickly. Competition between the parties on the extreme right was particularly fierce. The leadership of the *Action Française* and the *Jeunesses Patriotes* were afraid of the rising political power of the *Faisceau* because the membership of George Valois's party consisted of mostly former *Camelot du Roi* and *Jeunesses Française* adherents (Soucy, 112). The revolutionary nature of the *Faisceau*, a political party that refused to participate in "parliamentary" elections, was a driving force in the party's popularity during the rule of the *Cartel des Gauches.* In reaction to the rising membership of the *Faisceau*, members of the *Camelots du Roi* would infiltrate and disrupt meetings of the *Faisceau.* Eventually, Valois' unwillingness or inability to provide order within the meetings of the *Faisceau* proved in the eyes of the right wing that the *Faisceau* leadership would not be able to stand up to the communists. By the late 1920s, the *Faisceau* collapsed.

In Germany, fascist revolutionaries were a politically influential minority but were nonetheless unable to bring about a fascist revolution in the immediate interwar period. One should note that the German army returned to a country in the midst of the German Revolution. The Imperial Army had collapsed as they retreated back across the border, in its place workers' and soldiers' councils were seizing power in different cities around the *Heimat.* Not all of the German army was comfortable with the revolutionaries and reactionary formations formed up in

every part of the country. The Social Democratic government of Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Scheidemann appointed Gustav Noske, a social democrat well respected by the military upper echelon, to the position of Minister of Defense. The regular army was hopelessly fragmented and large portions of the armed forces openly supported the revolutionaries. Noske needed a new army to bring order to Germany and on the morning of January 4th, 1919 he visited Camp Zossen and reviewed the first group of official Freebooters organized by General Ludwig von Maercker. The numbers of *Freikorps* members surged to a height of nearly four hundred thousand; Noske gave "official authorization to a movement which was already sweeping the country" (Waite, 33). By 1920 these ruthless right-wing reactionaries would brutalize politics by decisively defeating the German workers' and soldiers' councils and coming close to overthrowing the bourgeois regime with a full scale rightist putsch.

Within the various Freebooter brigades, the majority of the soldiers were former front soldiers. After being demobilized, these soldiers returned to a country threatened by leftist revolution and they responded by converting themselves into rightwing battalions to push back against workers' and soldiers' councils. As opposed to the workers' and soldiers' councils, which took their names from the places where they were organized, the Freebooters frequently named their formations after their commanders in an early manifestation of the famed *Fuehrerprinzip.* Thus the Ehrhardt Brigade, Haase Free Corps, and Maercker's Volunteer Rifles, all named for their commanders. Noske was unwilling to force the *Freikorps* into any kind of unified command structure, something the Freebooters would have undoubtedly resisted violently, and as a consequence, the Freebooter movement, unlike the Italian Fascist Party, remained fragmented. The German fascist movement would not fully centralize until the ascent of the National Socialists after the Great Depression.

In the two years immediately following the end of the war, the Freebooters acted vigorously to defeat leftist movements in Germany. The Spartacists were in control of several major centers of Germany: Berlin, Munich, and the Ruhr. On the 9th of January, 1919 Noske organized an offensive by the proto-fascists. In the midst of revolutionary Berlin, the *Freikorps* attacked, "spearheaded by the Potsdam Shock Troops and supported by flame-throwers, machine guns, trench mortars, and artillery" (Waite, 61). By the 14th of January the city of Berlin had been forcibly pacified. Just a few short days later, the national elections, which would see the election of a Social Democratic majority to the Reichstag, took place without any demonstrations.

Through the month of January the Freebooters "pacified" leftist movements in Bremerhaven, Cuxhaven, and Wilhelmshaven (Waite, 67). In early May, the Freebooters annihilated the Spartacist government in Munich. The Von Epp Free Corps were ordered by Noske to intervene against the communist government in Bavaria. Beginning on the 30th of April the Freebooters began their offensive against the leftists. Within a few days the Spartacist Republic in Bavaria had been smashed. During their offensive the Freebooters frequently sought out noncombatants and summarily executed them. One *Freikorps* lieutenant arrested a group of people in nearby Perlach and had them shot at the *Hofbraeuhaus* in Munich. On another occasion, a *Freikorps* Captain had a group of Catholic workers shot. The number of corpses was so great that "the decaying corpses which littered the streets became a health menace…. The Freebooter's solution to the problem [was that]…. shallow trenches were dug and the unnamed corpses were shoved in" (Waite, 90).

Political murder was to become one of the most important tools of the German fascist movement in the immediate interwar period. In 1922, Emil Julius Gumbel, a young German

social scientist, published a tract called *Vier Jahre politischer Mord (Four Years of Political Murder),* that demonstrated the frequency with which Freebooters used murder as a political weapon. Within four years the right was responsible for the political murder of over 354 people (Gumbel, 145). The most significant early murder was the killing of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, two of the most important German communists instrumental in the Berlin Spartacist Revolution; they were kidnapped and murdered by *Freikorps* soldiers. The most important murder by the Freebooters was the brazen 1922 assassination of Walther Rathenau, the German Foreign Minister and a cosmopolitan diplomat, who had represented the strongest hope for Germany's reconciliation with her neighbors.

The Rathenau murder demonstrated one thing to the Weimar government—the Freebooters might be as dangerous to established government as they were to the Spartacists. Although the *Freikorps* ostensibly worked for the government, being paid handsomely for their service, the Freebooters were ideologically opposed to the Social Democratic government. In fact, many of the Free Corps were openly opposed to the Social Democratic government they held responsible for the collapse of Imperial Germany. According to their twisted ideology, the government of Reich President Friedrich Ebert had stabbed the army in the back (the infamous *Dolchstosslegende)*, depriving the front soldier of their rightful victory in the trenches of the Western Front. The Freebooters contempt for the government reached into the *Freikorps* pursuit of an independent foreign policy. In early 1920 multiple Freebooter detachments became involved in independent military campaigns against the new governments of Eastern Europe seeking to secure territory for German minorities on a long-term basis. In response to the defeat of the Spartacists, the reactions of foreign governments to incursions by Freebooters, and the danger posed by Freebooters to the bourgeois government, Ebert and the Social Democratic

Reichstag ordered the rightists to disband. Instead of disbanding, the Ehrhardt Marine Brigade, u in league with a civil servant named Wolfgang Kapp, on the 13th of March, marched into Berlin and occupied the government. Ebert and the Reichstag fled to Stuttgart. The government was helpless to retake Berlin; large numbers of soldiers were unwilling to operate against the Freebooters. Only under pressure from a general strike, organized by the communists, did the leadership of the Kapp Putsch finally cede control of Berlin to the Weimar government.

The end of the first fascist movement in Germany is traditionally defined by the failure of Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. On November 9th, 1923 members of the nascent National Socialist Party, acting under the influence of Mussolini and trying to centralize the Freebooter campaign, led a Putsch in Bavaria. Hitler was able to capture several important government officials in the *Buergerbraeukeller*; but absent their consent, he was unable to gather enough support to forward his *voelkisch* revolution in Bavaria. The next morning Hitler, Ernst Roehm, and Erich Ludendorff marched against the bourgeois government in Munich, which led to a brief shootout with police that resulted in Hitler's being injured and captured. Despite the fact that several people were killed in his coup attempt, Hitler received a minor sentence. Fascism in Germany was forced underground. Most of the Freebooter units were ostensibly ordered disbanded, although few formations actually dissolved and many remained camouflaged as workers collectives (especially forest workers!). A sizable portion of the Germany military establishment supported the retention of the Free Corps as an irregular force, which alongside the Black *Reichswehr*, represented a viable military option beyond the limits set by the Versailles Treaty. Again the Weimar governments' ambivalence towards these paramilitaries would allow the Free Corp to reemerge and form the first battalions of Hitler's SA and SS in 1926 and 1927, when the Nazi Party arose as a minor political entity preceding the Great Depression.

Comparison between the different fascist organizations illuminates the formation of a unique fascist uniform aesthetic that spread throughout Western Europe in the immediate interwar period. In the months after the war, many soldiers in Workers' and Soldiers Councils and the fascist squads wore hodgepodge combinations of their former trench outfits. One example was the Black and Tans with their tan pants of their trench uniforms and dark green overcoats of the northern Irish home guard. Eventually the fascist parties developed a unique uniform aesthetic pioneered by the Italians and adopted by the various groups such as the British Fascists, *Faisceau,* and the National Socialist SA and SS. These new uniforms had some traditional elements, but were dominated by militarily useless, symbolic accoutrement. The Italians had their black shirts, riding pants, and putties. The French wore blue shirts and carried canes. The English also wore black shirts and shorts. The Germans had their brown shirts, armbands and kepi hats. These uniforms represented an introduction of the comradeship of the trench experience on the bourgeois political landscape.

The immediate interwar period provided a brief opening during which fascist parties were able to attack bourgeois government from the right. These parties were reacting to the legacy of the bourgeois government during the war, the threat of communism during the "Red Years," and the continuing instability during the interwar period. In Italy, the political center was almost completely emptied and the Fascists came to power as politics became brutalized by the ex-front soldiers of the left and the right. In France and Great Britain, veterans associated with the fascist and labor movements fought during the immediate interwar period, but neither group presented a very strong threat until after the Great Depression. In Germany, Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and Freebooters actively threatened and in many cases dislodged bourgeois government. Only the skillful maneuvering of politicians and the acquiescence of the Socialist

Party politicians Ebert and Scheidemann to bourgeois, parliamentarian government managed to prevent the immediate collapse of the Weimar government. The first fascist wave was successful only in Italy, but a second wave of fascism would arise in the wake of the Great Depression that would be based on the foundations of these proto-fascist movements. It was the second wave of fascism that would bring Hitler to power and threaten governments in France and Britain.

## Artists and the Great War

Coming home from the war, many veterans were unable to express the profound social malaise created by millions of youths having spent their formative years inside the trenches. Fortunately, a large number of writers and artists (many well known before the war, but many unknown) served at the front lines. These war artists were the veterans who were the most able to express their dissatisfactions with the conduct of the bourgeois, democratic system during the war and the immediate interwar period. In particular, the fields of literature, poetry, and painting were blessed with a large number of particularly expressive artists, whose work provides a medium from which modern historians can experience the feelings of veterans in the interwar period. Moreover, there were seemingly no artists who experienced firsthand the horrors of the war and came home to work in the moderate center. In contrast, some artists sympathized with both the workers' and soldier' councils movement and the proto-fascist movement. Within the political left wing and right wing, veterans were full of violent, anti-bourgeois, and anti-democratic attitudes; and these attitudes were mirrored in the paintings, poems, and novels of prominent war artists from every nation in Western Europe.

Erich Maria Remarque is one of the most famous First World War authors and his writing drew heavily on his wartime experiences. When he was eighteen, he was conscripted and he served several months in the trenches before finally suffering numerous wounds. While he was recuperating in the hospital, the war ended. In 1937, Erich Maria Remarque published *Three Comrades,* a novel about three war veterans; Robert, Otto, and Lenz who live and work in interwar Berlin. *Three Comrades* demonstrated the anti-bourgeois, anti-democratic, and violent tendencies readily apparent in the interwar period.

Remarque exemplified anti-bourgeois feelings through the three veterans who run an auto repair shop and took turns driving a taxi. They spend the evenings avoiding any trappings of bourgeois community by drinking and reminiscing about the war in seedy bars packed with prostitutes and veterans. When one of the prostitutes comes in announcing that she is going to be married, Robert lampoons her sentimentality, misplaced as it seemed to be in the interwar period. The prostitute was carrying antimacassars (a doily), which were "the symbol of little bourgeois respectability" but there were almost no antimacassars in interwar Berlin and it was not proper for a prostitute to wear them (Remarque, Three Comrades, 53). But in the bar where Robert, Otto and Lenz drink, the bourgeois conventions are turned upside down; the veterans are served by their former trench mates and the prostitutes can wear antimacassars.

These veterans in *Three Comrades* were profoundly affected by their time at the war, Robert is now an avowed nihilist, and they vow to recreate their society through radical politics. The years after the war were described as simply the 'Revolution'. Otto and Lenz were put into a prison for being revolutionaries. The three veterans would "wage war against the lies, the selfishness, the greed, the inertia of the heart" and hope that they would overthrow the bourgeois regime (Remarque, Three Comrades, 60). During that time, the political situation "provided

theatre enough – the shootings every night made another concert" (Remarque, Three Comrades, 187). Thus, Remarque shows that in the immediate interwar period politics were decided in the streets instead of the ballot box.

Violence is prevalent in the *Three Comrades,* and when Robert, Otto and Lenz have problems they are quick to deal with them violently. For example, when Robert gets into a confrontation over a taxi stand, he resorts to punching another cab driver and the veteran that he punches quickly becomes a close friend. Near the end of the novel, Lenz is killed in a political disturbance. Although Robert and Otto clearly saw the killer's face, they do not help the police catch him. With the help of some other veterans, they hunt the man down over the course of a year before finally killing him. On both occasions, Remarque shows how violence was deemed preferable to order and reason to many ex-front soldiers.

Among the large number of veterans that returned home immediately from the war, there were many soldiers for whom the call to violence did not abate with the armistice. Veterans throughout Western Europe continued to use the violent techniques of war to bring about political change. These violent revolutionaries had their voices within the artistic community—in both the revolutionary workers' and soldiers' councils and the proto-fascist movements.

It should come as no surprise that the most popular writer among the *Freikorps* advocated violence in the immediate postwar period. Ernst Juenger fought in the frontlines for the whole of the war, winning Germany's highest honor: the *Pour le Mérite.* After the war, Juenger became an author; his most famous early book was *Storm of Steel (Im Stahlgewittern),* which described in detail his wartime experiences. Although Juenger himself never served in the *Freikorps* because he was still in the German armed forces, his work was seen as representative of the general opinion of most Freebooters during the Weimar Republic. In *Fire (Feuer),* Juenger

makes his most alarming statements about violence in the interwar period. He states, "This war is not the end but the prelude to violence…. The force in which the new world will be hammered into new borders and new communities… New forms want to be filled with blood… The festival is about to begin, and we are its princes" (Juenger, Fire, 75). According to Juenger, the new men of the war, those who survived, were going to bring the war back from the front to redraw the borders and communities of Central Europe.

In contrast, Erich Kaestner was only fifteen when the war began and in 1917 he was drafted into an artillery company and sent to serve in the front line. When he returned Kaestner was involved with the German left; his anti-militarist and anti-capitalist sentiments came back fully formed from the war. His poems echoed the workers' and soldiers' councils. In "The Class of 1899". Kaestner wrote:

> Somehow we passed the test.
> We forget what it was for.
> We're alone day in day out,
> There's nothing decent to eat.
> We look the world in the eye.
> Instead of playing with toys
> We spit in the face of the world –
> Those not drowned in French mud.
> Neither our bodies or minds
> Had time enough to ripen.
> Too soon, too much, too long
> We were tangled in our times.
> The old men say now's the season,
> Now we'll harvest what we've sown.
> We're almost ready. Soon it'll be time.
> Want us to show you what we learned? (Kaestner, 18).

The last line of the poem cannot be read as anything but a thinly veiled threat to the liberal, democratic government that sent the soldiers out to war.

Across the Channel, England also had more than a few artists who served at the front and were interested in expressing their violence towards democratic, bourgeois government.

Siegfried Sassoon was one of the best known war poets and a postwar revolutionary; he said "I shall make my red coats into red flags" (Bogacz, 414). Sassoon frequently felt violent rage when he thought about the liberal government of Great Britain. He stated in a letter to a friend, "It makes me mad to think of all the good men being slaughtered this summer and all for nothing. The bloody politicians and ditto generals… I wish I could do something to protest against it. If I shot the Premier or Douglas Haig (- or even Frankie Lloyd!)" (Bogacz, 224). Douglas Haig was the British Field Martial that ordered the attacks at both the Battle of the Somme and the Third Ypres—two failed, meat-grinder style attacks that cost thousands of lives and were extremely unpopular among the front soldiers.

Sassoon's violent urges are reflected in his poems. In the 1917 poem "Blighters" Sassoon imagined the annihilation of those in the upper middle class who avoided service at the front. Sassoon wrote:

> The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
> And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks
> Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
> "We're sure the Kaiser loves our dear old Tanks!"
> I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
> Lurching to ragtime tunes, or "Home, sweet Home",
> And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls
> To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume (Sassoon, 68).

Sassoon frequently imagined the soldiers turning their weapons against the politicians and pressmen who gleefully sent the soldiers to war against Germany. Again in another poem, "Fight to a Finish", Sassoon wrote:

> The boys came back. Bands played and flags were flying,
> And Yellow-Pressmen thronged the sunlit street
> To cheer the soldiers who'd refrained from dying,
> And hear the music of returning feet.
> "Of all the thrills and ardours War has brought,
> This moment is the finest" (So they thought.)
> Snapping their bayonets on to charge the mob,

> Grim Fusiliers broke ranks with glint of steel,
> At last the boys had found a cushy job.
> I hear the Yellow-Pressmen grunt and squeal;
> And with my trusty bombers turned and went
> To clear those Junkers out of Parliament (Sassoon, 96).

Both "Blighters" and "Fight to the Finish" represent the rhetorical violence of the workers' and soldiers' councils at the extremes. Nor is it entirely coincidental that the victims in "Blighters" (the upper class aristocrats) and "Fight to the Finish" (politicians and pressmen) were the pillars of the nineteenth century bourgeois state.

Most of the war artists were not as openly aggressive as Juenger or Sassoon; many artists were content only to voice anti-bourgeois opinions. Some of the artists were subtle in their critiques, preferring simply to break from tradition instead of attacking the edifices of the liberal, bourgeois society. But most of the war artists were more overt, embedding strong anti-capitalist and anti-democratic messages in their art. One of the most common critiques was that the societies had objectified the soldiers during the war—turning them into machines that were easily destroyed and replaced. Other criticisms of the bourgeois system were more general. Soldiers complained frequently that when it came time to do the fighting the propertied classes pushed for war but did not keep their end of the bargain by fighting alongside the soldiers.

As it happens, many of the bourgeois class were either too old to fight or too important to be drafted; a notable exception being the vast number of "private school" boys in England (or the legendary *Langemarke* boys of 1914 in Germany) who volunteered and died in the first few months of the war. These early upper-class volunteers were said to be the best of their generation, dying charging forward valiantly and singing "God Save the Queen" and "*Deutschland, Deutschland ueber Alles."* In contrast, for the next for years the vast numbers of soldiers came from poor backgrounds and were drafted to fight, with little of the fan fair of

earlier volunteers, against similarly poor soldiers from other countries. For many soldiers, the upper classes who remained home to run industries were seen as profiting from the war, instead of the soldiers they were concerned with selling more bullets, shells, and newspapers—oftentimes due to mandatory nightly shelling by both sides, to the detriment of ordinary soldiers.

Some of the critiques of the bourgeois system were so subtle that one could be forgiven for missing them. The French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, was a soldier at the front line. During his time at the front, Apollinaire wrote subversive poems that attacked the bourgeois system on two levels – he critiqued conventional bourgeois poetic styles and undermined support for the war. In his poem "Voici le Cerceuil", the poet stated: "Long live France! He sleeps in his li/ttle soldier's bed" (Apollinaire, 145). The meaning: the France that did not fight in the war represented a false France. The real France was buried outside Verdun. Apollinaire also used a technique called concrete poetry where the typographical arrangement of the words was important to conveying theme. In this case, Apollinaire shaped his poem into a coffin and tomb. Apollinaire's poem attacks poetic conventions, a general assault made by modernism on artistic convention immediately after the war. At the same time, Apollinaire's choice to make the poem into a coffin was a strong critique of the French society that put so many of his contemporaries into early coffins.

Not all war artists were as subtle in their critique of bourgeois society. One of the most common criticisms was that bourgeois society had objectified and abandoned the soldiers who served valiantly at the front. One of the most moving—and unknown—poems of the First World War talks directly about the feeling that soldiers were sacrificed unnecessarily by an overly anxious society drunk on war jingoism. Wilfred Owen, famous for his poems *Dulce et Decorum*

*est* and *Anthem for Doomed Youth,* also wrote the poem *Parable of the Old Men and the Young.*

In *Parable,* Owen writes:

> So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
> And took the fire with him, and a knife.
> And as they sojourned both of them together,
> Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
> Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
> But where the lamb for this burnt offering?
> Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
> And builded parapets and trenches there,
> And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
> When lo! An angel called him out of heaven,
> Saying, lay not thy hand upon the lad,
> Neither do anything to him. Behold,
> A ram caught in a thicket by its horns;
> Offer the ram of pride instead of him.
> But the old man would not so, but slew his son…
> And half the seed of Europe, one by one (Owen, 42).

The underlying critique, that the bourgeois governments led a whole generation of eighteen-year olds to their untimely deaths, is clear and made even more poignant by the fact that Wilfred Owen was himself killed at the front the week before the Armistice.

Another more vocal critique of the bourgeois system appeared when Erich Maria Remarque wrote the famous anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front,* a semi-autobiographical war story. One of the central questions faced by Remarque's soldiers was the question of why they were fighting. By the end of the novel, Remarque's characters seem to come to the conclusion that they are acting as surrogates for rich and powerful interests. On one occasion Remarque's soldiers refer tangentially to the objectification of soldiers by proposing an interesting solution to the problem of war. Instead of having ordinary people who are drafted as soldiers serving the interests of the powerful, the powerful can fight each other in symbolic combat. Instead of the trenches, "a declaration of war should be a kind of popular festival…. In the arena the ministers and generals of the two countries, dressed in bathing-drawers and armed

with clubs, can have it out among themselves. Whoever survives, his country wins" (Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front, 41). On another occasion a group of soldiers were discussing the reasons wars begin when one soldier named Tjaden says that the wars start when one country offends another. His trench mates laugh, "A mountain in Germany cannot offend a mountain in France." Tjaden argues that he means that the state or the people offend another state or people and that the state and the home country could not exist separately. The rest of the soldiers disagree, stating that "almost all of us are simple folk. And in France too, the majority of men are labourers, workmen, or poor clerks… why would a French blacksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us? No it is merely the rulers." Tjaden then wonders aloud, what is the purpose of the war. The rest of the soldiers agree, "There must be some people to whom the war is useful." They then proceed to list people to whom the war is useful: rulers, generals, and a thinly veiled hint at business concerns (Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front, 205-206).

At the onset of the Great War, another British artist, Paul Nash volunteered for the Artists' Rifles. In 1917, after almost a year, Nash returned from the front wounded and began painting a series of war canvases. Nash was, in his own words, "no longer an artist." He was "a messenger who will bring back the word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on forever." He lamented: "Feeble, inarticulate will be my message, but it will be a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls" (Cork, 189). Nash's paintings, such as *The Ypres Salient at Night* or *A Howitzer Firing*, showed the war as the soldiers saw it — a violent, mechanical conflict that swallowed men in dirt and fire. The soldiers are painted in an angular, expressionistic style. In both *Ypres Salient* and *Howitzer Firing*, the angular strokes Nash used to paint the soldiers make the cannoniers seemingly indistinguishable from their cannons.

Nash's soldiers symbolized the objectification and mechanization of men who served at the front.

Another artist whose themes included the objectification and commodification of soldiers was German painter, Otto Dix, who spent considerable amounts of time in uniform at the frontline. His later work was extremely influential in bringing home the war experience to non-participants. Otto Dix argues that the liberal, bourgeois system treated soldiers as objects in his 1920 canvas entitled *Prague Street.* In *Prague Street,* the focus is on two disabled war veterans, one of whom is missing his legs while the other is blind and missing an arm. Around the war veterans society passes, without much thought or even heed. One woman passes, her bright skirt and absurdly high heels barely avoids stepping on the war veterans. A man passes to the other side, managing to throw a few coins into one of the veteran's hand — at a time of massive inflation. At the bottom of the picture both of the veterans are being harassed by a dog that nobody has the decency to stop. In the store windows behind the war veterans, artificial appendages are for sale next to mannequins sporting summer dresses. These veterans were sent to war, where they were wounded, and now are being exploited economically in the interwar period. Dix is suggesting that the suffering of the soldiers has become a commodity for the bourgeois world. The soldiers have been forgotten as quickly and with as much vigor as they were sent to war.

Some artists' critiques were more general. Again Erich Kaestner provides a voice for dissatisfied war veterans. Kaestner's criticism in "Short Summary of My Life" centers around the fact that soldiers who returned from the war believed that the bourgeois life lacked purpose. In "Short Summary of My Life" Kaestner declares in satire:

> If you have never been born, you probably haven't missed too much.
> You can sit up in a tree somewhere in the universe, laughing….

He continues on to talk about his war experience,

> Then instead of recess, we had war.
> Blood poured out of the world's arteries.
> I was a foot soldier in the artillery,
> I lived through it, don't ask how.

Finally, Kaestner looks back on his life and is only able to offer that consolation that he has not died or killed himself, saying,

> I carry my own luggage – with me in it.
> It's getting heavy, my back's hurting.
> All in all, it says something for me: in spite
> Of being born into this world. I'm persisting (Kaestner, 28).

The picture Kaestner paints of the war veteran is someone for whom the façade of bourgeois existence was lost in the fires of war and who is bleak and depressed coming home to a society changed little by a long, brutal war.

There were many other distinguished war painters who were disgusted with bourgeois society in the interwar period. In the 1920s German veterans such as George Grosz illuminated the workers' and soldiers' councils' critiques of capitalist society following the First World War. George Grosz was an active member of the German Communist Party and a self-styled revolutionary. His 1917 painting *Metropolis: The City* attacked the foundation of bourgeois society. The style of *Metropolis* is expressionist, and heavily influenced by cubism. The color scheme is monochromatic, the overlapping red hues of the painting suggesting violence and bloodshed. The perspective is distorted, subtly indicating that bourgeois society viewpoint is deformed. The subject matter of *The City* reinforces the style. In *The City,* Grosz depicts the important people of bourgeois society, clergy, businessmen and generals, as a mob. The mob is passing by a café displaying the imperial flag of Germany. An open coffin with a skeleton is being carried by the mob to symbolize their carrying a whole generation forth to war. In the

background, the symbols of bourgeois life, such as umbrellas and carriages, fall from the sky, literally and symbolically crushing people on the ground below them.

In another painting, *Germany: A Winter's Tale*¸ Grosz depicts a Weimar Germany that is falling into chaos while the rich and powerful stand idle. In *Winter's Tale,* the middle of the painting is dominated by a soldier, with combat medals, sitting at a barren table picking at scraps. Around the soldier buildings crumble, clock towers stop working, a church burns, and workers, soldiers and prostitutes are roaming the streets looking destitute. In the foreground a businessman, a general, and a priest stand large, ignoring the trouble brewing behind them. The painting is an allegory for the situation in early Weimar Germany. The capitalist classes are represented by the businessman, the general, and the priest who are unconcerned with the rampant chaos happening throughout Germany behind them. Thus, Grosz criticized the upper classes that remain willfully ignorant of the calamities that the end of the war brought to Germany. The soldiers back with their combat medals are left sitting at a paltry table, watching their women prostitute themselves, while battling veterans and workers tear at the foundations of the country.

Another of Grosz's German contemporaries, Max Ernst, also critiqued bourgeois society. During the war, Ernst served at the Front. When he returned he was one of the founding members of the Cologne Dada movement. Dada, which started during the First World War in Switzerland, protested against the bourgeois society that Dadaists, such as Ernst, viewed as responsible for the war. In general, Dada artists utilized new mediums and techniques, eschewing tradition as counter revolutionary. At its most extreme, Dada was intended to offend bourgeois sensibilities and to destroy bourgeois culture. Ernst's Dada Cologne was very extreme; the attack against bourgeois culture presented by Dadaism was overt but not very

accessible. The Dada Cologne movements' first exhibition was held in a bar and the audience was expected to walk around urinals while being bombarded by obscene poetry by a woman in a communion dress. In the eyes of the Cologne Dadaist, the bourgeois system was best represented by a bawdy barmaid spouting obscenities over a bunch of urinals.

The bourgeois community did feel threatened by the critiques of the war artists. Many of the veterans' works were censored during wartime, and obscenity laws kept a few of them from being displayed even in the immediate interwar period. One of the first major films in the interwar period, *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* relates to the connection between bourgeois society and the violence of the returning veterans. The writers of *Dr. Caligari,* Hans Janowitz and Carl Meyer, were war veterans and wrote *Dr. Caligari* as an assault against the bourgeois system that produced the war. In *Caligari,* an insane Dr. Caligari and his somnambulist Cesare, cause panic in a small German town by committing random murders. At the end, the young protagonist, Francis, discovers Dr. Caligari's misdeeds and has the Doctor committed to an insane asylum. In *Dr. Caligari,* the Doctor symbolizes the old guard who hypnotize Cesare, representing the soldiers of the First World War, to commit the murders of the First World War. To clarify their anti-bourgeois position, the writers, Janowitz and Meyer, convinced the director to construct the backgrounds in the new, revolutionary expressionist style. At the last moment, concerned about the subversive nature of the film, the producer Erich Pommer added framing scenes that suggest that it is Francis who is crazy; the good Dr. Caligari vows to cure Francis at the films end. As a consequence, *Dr. Caligari* demonstrates the conflict between revolutionary war veterans and the society that wanted to suppress their subversive message.

A similar story happened in England during an interwar gallery opening that was showing some of the work of noted English war artists. C. W. Nevinson had served first at the

front and later as an official war artist. During the latter part of the war, he finished a work called *Paths of Glory,* which depicted two British dead wrapped in the barbed wire of no-mans-land. At the time, the British government was censoring images that showed war dead over concern that their images might upset the living relatives. Despite the fact that Nevinson's painting shows only the backs of two dead soldiers, Nevinson's portrait was censored during the war. At the gallery opening, Nevinson refused to show the whole canvas and hung a large strip of paper over the painting with the word 'censored' written on it. The image created quite a stir; Nevinson pushed back against the society that had sent him off to war and refused to allow him to tell the truth about it when he came home.

Not all of the veterans expressed only negative sentiments; many veterans also believed that society would be recreated in the light of the trench experience. The attitude of revolutionary veterans on the left and right can best be expressed by Ernst Juenger in his wartime autobiography *Storm of Steel.* According to Juenger, "the incredible massing of forces in the hour of destiny, to fight for a distant future, and the violence it so surprisingly, stunningly unleashed, had taken me for the first time into the depths of something that was more than mere personal experience" (Juenger, Storm of Steel, 255). For these veterans, wartime experience was personally transformative and they believed that the experiences of the trenches would prove transformative for society also, undermining bourgeois governments and bringing about a new future.

Paul Klee, a major artist in the Bauhaus movement, first served as an aviator at the front, eventually specializing in camouflaging the front line. During his time in at the front, Klee became obsessed with the use of color in artwork and his postwar works demonstrate a revolutionary use of color. Klee's use of color demonstrates a clear rejection of tradition and a

breaking of artistic convention. After the war, he served on the Munich Council of visual arts during the time of the Spartacist regime. Immediately following its collapse, Klee was forced for a short time to flee to Switzerland. While he was with the Spartacists, Klee added symbolic rising suns to at least three of his major works: *Villa R, Vollmord,* and *Rising Sun.* A rising sun is associated with images of rebirth and the rising suns in Klee's work seem to represent Klee's belief that the revolutionary movement in Munich that foreshadowed a kind of newer, brighter future for mankind.

A third artist who believed that a better world would arise out of the trenches was Henri Barbusse who wrote the first war epic from the frontlines in 1916, a book that was lauded by many of Barbusse's contemporaries. *Le Feu* is a strongly anti-bourgeois tract that follows the lives of a few *poilus.* Barbusse's company is made of fighting men with "hardly any intellectuals, or men of the arts or of wealth" (Barbusse, 17). Barbusse's protagonist argues that "there are too many rich and influential people who have shouted 'Let us save France! – and begin by saving ourselves!' On the declaration of war, there was a big rush to get out of it, that's what there was, and the strongest succeeded. I noticed myself, in my little corner, it was especially those that jawed most about patriotism previously" (Barbusse, 125). According to Barbusse, the rich and the privileged avoided the war deliberately. In the prologue to the book, Barbusse writes about his dream for the future, a dream where the "the thirty million slaves, hurled upon one another in the mud of war…reveal at last a bourgeoning Will. The future is in the hands of these slaves… who will transform the old world (Barbusse, 4).

Most importantly, within the artistic community there was indecision about whether to support radical movements of the political left or the political right. There were many important politicians and artists who were enamored with both the fascists and the communists. A short

list includes Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle, Gabriele D'Annunzio, George Valois, and Wyndham Lewis. Lewis was an English war artist, a famous Vorticist painter, who served as a six inch gunner with the British Army in Passchendaele. In one edition of his postwar journal called *Blast,* Lewis wrote "I believe the Sovietic system to be the best… And yet for the Anglo-Saxon countries… some modified form of Fascism would probably be best…. Fascism is merely a spectacular Mariennettian flourish on the tail or the head of Marxism" (Gasiorek, 82).

## Conclusion

Both the Workers' and Soldiers' Council movement and the Fascist movement were suppressed in most of Western Europe. Only in Italy did Fascism overturn bourgeois government in the postwar period. The emergence of these movements represented a threat to the established bourgeois order; nonetheless, as Charles Maier argues in *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, the bourgeois governments proved astoundingly resilient in the interwar period. The governments of Western Europe were uniquely talented at repulsing the spread of international communism and proto-fascism in the postwar period. By 1926 the economy of Europe was moving towards recovery. Leftist governments in Britain, France, and Germany were replaced with right-wing politicians. The initial impetus for revolution had weakened.

On the political left, Workers' and Soldier's Councils overturned government in Germany, and threatened the social order in Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. In Germany, the council movement that sprung out of the Kiel revolution quickly upended the *Kaiserreich*. The German council movement was to be smashed under the feet of the Freebooters at the behest of their paymasters in the German Socialist Party. In Italy, the council movement attacked the social order in the cities and in the countryside; nevertheless, the gains

made by the Italian communists were quickly defeated by the brutal Italian Fascist Party. In England and France, the Workers' and Soldiers' movements attacked gains made by industrialists during the wartime; however, the Workers' and Soldiers' councils in England and France were never as revolutionary as in Germany. All over Western Europe, the unity of the workers and soldiers evaporated. The soldiers' and workers' demands were often mutually exclusive—the workers wanted to protect their jobs and wartime salaries while the soldiers wanted their pre-war jobs and positions returned. At the same time, the soldiers' initial demands, concerning demobilization and better treatment from their superiors, were accepted favorably by most governments in the interwar period. The most important factor undermining the council movement was the demobilization, which reduced the power of the council movement by physically separating the soldiers from the workers thus making it difficult for Workers' and Soldiers' councils to organize effectively. At the same time, many ex-soldiers were unable to enter into the workforce because of the limited number of jobs caused by the postwar recession.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the fascist movement proved even more dangerous for bourgeois government than the soldiers who sided with the communists. All of the Western European fascist squads, the *Freikorps* in Germany to the *squadristi* in Italy, took to pushing back against the advances of the "Red Years." As was the case in most of Western Europe, these fascist parties initially acted with the consent of the bourgeois government. By the middle of the 1920s the fascist movements proved that they, too, were a threat to bourgeois order. In Germany, there was the Kapp Putsch that was only defeated when the socialist party received assistance from the communist party. Next the Italian Fascist Party, which through violence and electoral fraud took power in Italy by 1924, acted as an example for the rest of Western Europe. In England and France, drawing on the policies and the aesthetic of the fascists

in Italy, parties such as the *Faisceau* and the British Fascisti, helped to bring the brutal tactics learned in the trenches to the political arena. As the social conditions that brought about the fascist reaction improved, there was less public support for the fascists, and it became more difficult for fascist parties to operate openly. By 1924, the *Freikorps* in Germany were forced to formally disband, hiding their membership in apolitical clubs such as woodland associations. In Britain and France the most radical fascist parties were undermined by the rise of conservatives to the head of government. The moderate right quieted peoples fears of an immanent communist takeover and undermined support for the extreme right.

When they returned from the war, artists proved uniquely capable of explaining how the brutalization of the war was affecting the postwar political system. Within the artist's movement there was considerable variation – some artists openly communist, some fascist, many with elements of both. These artists were cognizant of the intense feelings of discontent within the interwar veterans' movements and themselves experienced these same feelings. These artists called for violence against the bourgeois regimes that sent their comrades to their deaths in Flanders, Verdun, and the Isonzo. They rejected the bourgeois hierarchies that kept the "heroes" of the war poor, lamed, and underrepresented in government. These artists envisioned a better future where the soldiers from the trenches would seize control of government and create a forward moving nation without hierarchies.

Despite the best efforts of these radical soldiers, the bourgeois system proved resilient and the only real outcome of the radical veterans' movement was to brutalize politics without regard to limits. Again, Max Beckmann, one of Weimar's most unflinching observers, perfectly characterized the worst excesses of the interwar veterans' in his painting *Die Nacht* exhibited in his 1919 collection *Die Hoelle.* In one of his most graphic canvases, Beckmann shows a savage

home invasion. The home invaders are frontline soldiers as evidenced by their hats and overcoats. The similarities with the front experience are tangible—raids into the opposite trenches were common and raiding parties often engaged in some of the most brutal fighting. In *Die Nacht,* the bourgeois husband, in his nightgown, is being strangled from behind by one soldier while another restrains his hands. A third soldier has finished suggestively bonding the wife and is busy covering the window with a shade. The other people in the painting are painted as prostitutes, hiding in the corners of the painting. All around the painting, the symbols of bourgeois life (candlesticks, top hats, and table cloths) are scattered helter-skelter. The soldiers appear to be settling in for a long night of sex, rape, and murder in the revolutionary streets of interwar Berlin. All around Europe the lights had gone out and in the dark of the night many interwar veterans, extreme in their dissatisfaction, waged a war against the bourgeois regimes that sent them to the trenches. This was a Europe-wide civil war that would allow the rise of fascism in Western Europe, a war that would lead directly to the horrors of an even greater conflict.

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